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Ashmore Anti-U.S. Diatribe Is Unprecedented Dissent

THE EXECUTIVE vice president of something called the Center for Democratic Studies in Santa Barbara, Calif., Harry Ashmore, has now joined the Communist mayor, or perhaps ex-mayor, of Florence, Italy, as a spurned dove of peace on the war in Vietnam.

In 15,000 words making clear his own immense superiority to mere elected and appointed officials of the United States Government, Ashmore has accused President Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and that Government in general of having "brutally" dashed an effort by Harry Ashmore to bring about peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese Communists.

Ashmore's predecessor in this form of and personal foreign policy demarche, a man named Giorgio La Pira, was reported or rumored to have attempted some such role in 1965 only to be rebuffed by the warmongers of Washington.

To be sure, the Communists in Hanoi themselves sneered at La Pira's alleged intervention as a fraud. Still, Secretary Rusk, was not saved thereby from denunciation as a mad war lord callowly refusing "negotiation" with an enemy by whom on 50-odd occasions extending over six years his every gesture toward genuine talks had been insolently rejected.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE within the limits of space to summarize Ashmore's complex dream of a case. The only thing that can be said in honest candor is that it is the self-important nonsense of a man who had been allowed by Washington to make some minor private probes in Hanoi and who concluded thereby that it all rested on his shoulders.

The net of his charges is that the "general stupidity of all the top people here was responsible for closing an avenue of fruitful talks with the North Vietnamese dictator, Ho Chi Minh, last February.

That the State Department made a mistake in ever dealing in confidence with this self-appointed diplomat, this wide-eyed innocent abroad far from the comfortable academic certainties of Santa Barbara, is clear enough. Ashmore has now found it impossible to respect the confidential relationship granted to him. That his present self-arranged publicity bath, as a man of peace cruelly used by the insensitive dolts of this Government, will harm any additional efforts to probe unofficially in Hanoi cannot be doubted, either.

But it is the implications of this affair that should concern all responsible men.

What it reflects is that the soft-liners on Vietnam, almost literally maddened by the inability of this tiny minority to drive the United States into appeasement in Vietnam, have adopted a form of "dissent" without parallel in our history.

THEY ARE prepared, in the face of mountains of objective proof to the contrary, to suggest that the reliable peace-seeking power is not the United States but rather the regime that broke the peace in the first place by invading South Vietnam.

They are prepared to slander their own country's motives, in substance to insinuate that its highest officials really like war and death and suffering, while in effect apologizing for its enemy.

They have long used the cliche that the United States is exhibiting "an arrogance of power" by being in Vietnam at all.

Maybe there is an "arrogance" in the open use of honest power to redeem national promises. Without doubt there is an unexampled arrogance of nonpower, a novel impudence of irresponsibility, to undertake to destroy the rsponsible conduct of foreign policy by those constitutionally chosen to direct it.

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